IN THE CLAIMS:

No claims have been amended herein. Please note that all claims currently pending and under consideration in the referenced application are shown below. This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application.

1.-17. (Cancelled)

18. (Previously Presented) A ladder hinge and rail assembly comprising:

a first ladder rail;

a second ladder rail;

a first hinge component having a laterally extending hinge tongue, a longitudinally extending rail mount section, and an abutment shoulder between the tongue and the rail mount section and extending across substantially an entire width of the longitudinally extending rail mount section, wherein the longitudinally extending rail mount section of the first hinge component is partially longitudinally disposed within the first ladder rail;

a second hinge component having a pair of plate segments defining a lateral hinge groove and a longitudinally extending rail mount section, the pair of plate segments each having a peripheral edge, wherein the longitudinally extending rail mount section of the second hinge component is partially longitudinally disposed within the second ladder rail, and wherein the hinge tongue of the first hinge component is disposed within the hinge groove of the second hinge component and configured to provide relative rotation of the first and second hinge components about a defined axis from a first relative position of the first hinge component and the second hinge component wherein the first ladder rail and the second ladder rail are angled with respect to each other, to a second relative position of the first hinge component and the second hinge component wherein, when in the second relative position, the first ladder rail and the second ladder rail are aligned with each other and the first hinge component extends substantially longitudinally from the second hinge component and wherein the shoulder abutment abuts a peripheral edge of one plate segment of the pair of plate segments in a substantially conformal manner and, when in

the first position, the abutment shoulder and the peripheral edge of the one plate segment are spaced from each other.

19. (Original) The ladder hinge and rail assembly of claim 18, wherein an internal cross-sectional periphery of the first rail is configured to interlock with and transmit an applied loading to the rail mount section of the first hinge component.

20. (Original) The ladder hinge and rail assembly of claim 19, wherein an internal cross-sectional periphery of the second rail is configured to interlock with and transmit an applied loading to the rail mount section of the second hinge component.

21. (Previously Presented) The ladder hinge and rail assembly of claim 18, wherein the rail mount section of the first hinge component includes a first reinforcement segment, a second reinforcement segment and a web segment extending therebetween, wherein the first and second reinforcement segments each exhibit a greater cross-sectional thickness than a cross-sectional thickness of the web segment.

22. (Previously Presented) The ladder hinge and rail assembly of claim 18, wherein the first hinge component is configured as a unitary member.

23. (Cancelled)

24. (Previously Presented) The ladder hinge and rail assembly of claim 18, wherein the second hinge component comprises an extruded member.

25.-27. (Cancelled)

28. (Previously Presented) The ladder hinge and rail assembly of claim 22, wherein the second hinge component is configured as a unitary member.

29 (Previously Presented) The ladder hinge and rail assembly of claim 24, wherein the first hinge component comprises an extruded member.

30. (Previously Presented) The ladder hinge and rail assembly of claim 18, wherein the longitudinally extending rail mount section of the first hinge component exhibits a varying cross-sectional geometry taken transverse to a longitudinal axis thereof, and wherein the longitudinally extending rail mount section of the first hinge component is partially longitudinally disposed within the first ladder rail in a substantially conformal and cooperatively mating relationship.

31. (Previously Presented) The ladder hinge and rail assembly of claim 30, wherein the longitudinally extending rail mount section of the second hinge component exhibits a varying cross-sectional geometry taken transverse to a longitudinal axis thereof, and wherein the longitudinally extending rail mount section of the second hinge component is partially longitudinally disposed within the first ladder rail in a substantially conformal and cooperatively mating relationship.

32. (Previously Presented) The ladder hinge and rail assembly of claim 18, wherein the abutment shoulder includes a substantially arcuate surface.

33. (Previously Presented) The ladder hinge and rail assembly of claim 32, wherein the abutment shoulder abuts the peripheral edge of the one plate segment along substantially the entire length of the arcuate surface.

34. (Previously Presented) The ladder hinge and rail assembly of claim 18, wherein the first hinge component and the second hinge component cooperatively define a beam when in the second relative position.